Brendan Fernandes’s dance-based installation A Call and Response explores the movement of bodies in public space. Over the course of the exhibition, the artist works with visitors and professional dancers to examine our everyday actions. Fernandes urges us to consider how a person’s movements, like making room for a fellow train commuter, can act as a meaningful kind of choreography. By reflecting on our physical encounters with others, how can we more authentically interact with one another?

The installation includes interactive sculptures such as swings that encourage movement, as well as choreographic prompts. Based on childhood games like hide-and-seek, the prompts encourage visitors to interact with each other in new ways. A group of professional dancers provide their physical interpretation of the prompts in rehearsals every other week in the space.

The Commons Artist Project: Brendan Fernandes is curated by January Parkos Arnall, Curator of Public Programs, with Christy LeMaster, Assistant Curator of Public Programs.
While moving down the street you encounter a group of people coming toward you from the opposite direction. Who will give way? A series of decisions about movement ensues. This set of gestures is not solely dictated by personal choice but rather a multitude of social constructs and personal and architectural variables. These behaviors are shaped by some of our earliest experiences, say, playground games like hide-and-seek, and extend to the formats of our built environments as adults. There is power inherent in visibility and an assumed right-of-way—but might we also find power in invisibility and in giving way?

The built urban environment has, in so many ways, determined our sense of self and of place in the world. In the early 1900s, social psychologists like John Dewey and Charles Horton Cooley proposed a social self determined through our personal encounters and interactions. Cooley’s “looking-glass self” posited that our sense of self is invariable and enduring effect on our development of identity. At the time Cooley was writing, the urban environment was drastically changing the nature of social interaction. Young people were beginning to more regularly inhabit close spaces in a tightly packed apartment building in a factory or moving into shared rooms with strangers—perhaps workmates or moving in with others. People were beginning to more regularly inhabit close spaces and of place in the world. In his performances to find new muscles for collaborative movement through simple choreographies and calls to action, Fernandes describes the body as both conveyor and conveyance: “endowed with meaning . . . [the body] is our expressive access point to follow-the-leader. Through play and social dance, the Commons becomes a transformative playground that empowers visitors to investigate the ways individual movements carry meaning. Dancers and visitors join together to collaborate in generating a set of gestures that move, gather, and attract other bodies in urban environments. The work aims to assert the body’s agency in critical mass and to interpret the voice of movement. Using games to structure interactions, participants explore the body as both a site and a conductor of meaning. Through choreographic prompts, he codes these bodies toward interaction and reflection.

Over the course of five months in the Commons, Fernandes plays with our physical agency, proposing choreographies for visitors alongside professional dancers around the construction of three childhood games: hide-and-seek, follow-the-leader, and call-and-response, and discover a new perspective on the world in choosing to trust in the other.

January
Parkos Arnall

The Commons places artistic and civic exchange at the heart of the museum. Here we encourage formal and informal dialogue as well as interactions among artists, visitors, and communities. The Commons is host to an array of programs, community meetings, and a biannual artist project.
TALK: BRENDAN FERNANDES WITH JANUARY PARKOS ARNALL
Wed, Jun 19, 6 pm
Edlis Neeson Theater
Artist Brendan Fernandes explores the themes of the exhibition with curator January Parkos Arnall and audiences.

COMMONS ARTIST PROJECT: BRENDAN FERNANDES
OPENING EVENT
Sun, Jun 23, 11 am
Commons
Celebrate the opening of Commons Artist Project: Brendan Fernandes with the artist. Visitors will enjoy light bites while being among the first to experience the exhibition. The project invites you to try out a set of choreographies and sculptural installations that the artist specifically constructed for the space.

PERFORMANCE, OPEN CALL
Fri, Jul 19, 6 pm
Commons
Fernandes asks visitors to answer a "call to movement" and participate in a collectively generated performance alongside professional dancers in the Commons and on the Anne and John Kern Terrace.

LISTEN AND MOVE
In addition to performances and activations, the physical exhibition includes architectural interventions, built structures, designed prompts, cues for movement, and a soundscape.

INSTALLATION IN COLLABORATION WITH:
Murals and floor layouts
Platform Design Studio, Chicago

Plinth and swings
Norman Kelley Studio, Chicago and New Orleans

Soundscape
Alex Inglizian

In addition to performances and activations, the physical exhibition includes architectural interventions, built structures, designed prompts, cues for movement, and a soundscape.

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Soundscape
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Movement creation
Benjamin Wardell, Michelle Reid, Kara Brody, and Elijah Richardson

Jumpsuits
The Rational Dress Society

Text “I want to play” to 900-900 for prompts and choreographies to enact both on-site at the MCA and in daily life.